



Urban Forestry Commission

DATE: xx March 2022 - DRAFT

TO: Mayor Tarter and City of Falls Church Council Members

FROM: Amy Crumpton, Urban Forestry Commission Chairperson

SUBJECT: 2021 Annual Report of the Urban Forestry Commission

In accordance with City Code 2-119(3)(f), the Urban Forestry Commission (UFC) presents the attached annual report for calendar year 2021 that highlights the Commission's 2021 Activities and our 2022 Priorities. Briefly, the Commission experienced these major gains and setbacks in 2021:

Major gains:

- Council adopted suggested language on sustainable practices for landscaping and open space into the secondary criteria for Special Exceptions (48-90).
- Increased communications with City staff and other City advisory bodies on defining and integrating green space and green infrastructure.

Major setbacks:

- Lack of adequate Public Works staff to assist the City Arborist, due to resignations and hiring difficulties, undermining forest management objectives.
- Continued need for City Code updates that reinforce the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act (1988, amended 2015). A review of the City's Code began in 2015 to incorporate amended language on trees and land use requirements under the CPBA. The Arborist and UFC were notified to a draft of changes in February 2021, but we are unclear as to when the process will be complete.

The UFC thanks the Council for its support and looks forward to continuing to provide thoughtful and practical policy recommendations. In addition to support from both Council and Planning Commission liaisons, the UFC commends the City Staff, especially Charles Prince, for their commitment and support for the City's urban forest.

Cc: Wyatt Shields, City Manager
Jim Snyder, Director, Community Planning and Economic Development Services
Joseph Schiarizzi, Chairperson, Environmental Sustainability Council
Kate Walker, Environmental Programs Coordinator

Following is a summary of 2021 UFC Activities and 2022 UFC Priorities which are organized under relevant UFC strategic themes in Chapter 5 of the Comprehensive Plan.

2021 UFC Activities

1. Optimized City Resources to Achieve Urban Forestry (UF) Goals
 - Drafted language, adopted by City Council, to promote sustainable practices for landscapes and open space within the Special Exceptions (48-90) secondary criteria
2. Protected City's Tree Canopy
 - Supported recertification of Falls Church as a Tree City USA with the Arbor Day Foundation. The City has been certified for 43 years.
 - Supported the Neighborhood Tree Program and Arborist planting of 68 street trees on residential properties.
3. Preserved Mature Trees During Residential Development
 - Conferenced with former Stormwater Task Force members to discuss the STF findings and recommendations as well as possible synergies between mature tree preservation and stormwater management in residential development.
4. Promoted Greenspace on Commercial and Mixed-Use Development Projects
 - Founders Row II project promises 11.6% tree cover in 20 years, slightly above a 10% minimum recommended in Virginia Code Section 15.2-961 for projects of this density. The UFC advocates for 15% canopy coverage and green landscaped open space. The project will increase impervious cover (1.58 acres to 2.04 acres) and decrease permeable soils (.51 acres to .05 acres) indicating that landscaped open space will be mostly hardscape which the UFC opposes. The UFC recommends retaining the mature trees along Broad Street, alternative native plantings instead of turf grass on the Ellison Street side of this project, and completion of the alley between Broad and Ellison Street.
 - One City Center proposes 11% tree canopy coverage and 16.5% landscaped open space. The UFC advocates again for increasing the canopy coverage and landscaped open space for this project particularly because a 10,369 sf park, not technically onsite for the new development, adjusts onsite landscaped open space to 11.5%. The UFC is concerned with the quality of private landscaped open space as it appears that artificial turf and no trees on upper-level decks of the development are proposed.
5. Protected Stream Corridors
 - Advocated that the City ask Mill Creek to increase its Voluntary Concession commitment to the Stormwater Fund for the Founders Row II project to \$45,000 to reflect an accurate loss of ecological services to the City over the next 20 years for 36 mature trees to be removed during development. The 36 mature trees absorb 14,256 gallons of stormwater per year and filter stormwater into the buried Pearson Branch tributary of Tripps Run.
 - Increased communication with City stormwater staff to assure UFC is part of green infrastructure discussions. The Arborist is currently responsible for management of public rain gardens.
6. Educated the Community and Encouraged Conservation Landscaping
 - Selected and promoted Black Cherry (*Prunus serotina*) as Tree of the Year.
 - Registered the City's Habitat Restoration Team tree plantings in City parks with the My Tree Counts program run by the Virginia Department of Forestry.
 - Supporting the Plant NOVA Tree Campaign through the Neighborhood Tree Program's partnership in the campaign.

7. Other Actions to Improve UFC Processes

- Arborist and the UFC student representative collated metrics on landscaped open space within City's development projects since 2007 for a comparative database.
- Compiled tree canopy coverage and landscaped open space requirements used in surrounding jurisdictions to compare approaches and gain ideas for improvement.

2022 UFC Priorities:

1. **Protect City Tree Canopy.** The UFC will continue to advocate for a minimum standard for tree canopy coverage in commercial mixed-use projects, promote tree maintenance agreement plans on all commercial and FCCPS sites, and work with partner organizations to identify potential planting sites that achieve more equitable distribution of publicly planted trees throughout the City.

In addition to these activities, the UFC requests that the City make 2023 budget accommodations for the following unmet needs to protect our tree canopy. Best management practices for urban forestry rely on up-to-date data collection to understand the overall structure and health of the canopy. Given our changing climate, the Arborist needs to document the rate of change in loss of trees that occur from weather events, pests and diseases, and planned development in order to plan for an adequate future canopy coverage.

2023 Budget requests to achieve this priority:

- \$90,000 (plus benefits) - Senior Urban Forestry position to manage urban forestry data and landscape contracts
- \$75,000 – \$100,000 - Tree Inventory Consultant to update data on all trees on City property.
- \$25,000 – 100 Trees a Year Program that sets a commitment by the City to fund tree plantings beyond infrequent funds from Voluntary Concessions by developers.

Protecting City Tree Canopy aligns with UFC activities that:

Optimize City Resources to Achieve UF Goals

Expand Space for Tree Planting

Educate the Community, Encourage Conservation Landscaping

2. **Integrate Preservation of Mature Trees into Stormwater Best Management Practices.**

The UFC will coordinate with Stormwater staff and the new Public Utilities Commission to ascertain requirements and create incentives for stormwater management practices that preserve mature trees in both residential and commercial developments.

Mature Tree Preservation and Stormwater BMPs align with UFC activities that:

Optimize City Resources to Achieve UF Goals

Preserve Mature Trees During Residential Development

Protect Stream Corridors

Educate the Community, Encourage Conservation Landscaping

3. **Define a Landscaped Open Space, Green Space Standard.** The UFC will coordinate with Arborist, Planning staff and Environmental Programs Coordinator to develop clear definition, measurable metrics and a minimum standard for landscaped open space to qualify as "green space" in new development projects. Present findings and recommendation to City Council.

Defining a "Green Space" standard aligns with UFC activities that:

Optimize City Resources to Achieve UF Goals

Promote Greenspace on Commercial and Mixed-Use Development Projects